

HR

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<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ **If I refer an employee who happens to be alcoholic to the EAP for performance problems, how is it possible for the employee assistance professional to successfully convince the employee that he or she needs treatment, especially if family or friends have never been successful?**

Not every alcoholic employee who visits the EAP is motivated to enter treatment, but the EAP setting has advantages not available to friends or family members. These increase the likelihood of success. Advantages include the initial reason for the visit and the desire to resolve management's concern about performance or behavior; the EA professional's assessment skills and ability to educate an employee about the disease of alcoholism and its array of symptoms; and the employee's willingness to accept the EA professional's direction to consider the benefits of treatment. The last of these is usually considered the most important because denial prevents acceptance of the illness, and an authentic desire to remain sober generally does not emerge until after treatment begins.

■ **During the holidays, I had employees to my house for a big get-together. My thinking is that I will earn more respect and morale will improve when people get a chance to let their hair down and know me better personally. Am I right?**

Business management experts generally hold to the dictum that familiarity breeds contempt. In fact, there is very little argument to the contrary in management literature. In support of this convention, research on improving morale and increasing respect does not focus on socializing with employees or having casual parties as ways of doing it. You are more likely to earn less respect because familiarity with your employees allows them the opportunity to observe your personal faults. Whatever they learn is included in their estimation of you. Less respect often follows. You should be professional, polite, consistent, and communicate well with your employees in order to earn respect. Consider whether a desire to socialize with employees reflects personal discomfort with your supervisory role or authority over employees. Consider help from the EAP in order to examine your view of supervision.

■ **How do I deal with disgruntled employees? I think that some employees like to complain just to complain. I call them “negaholics.” It’s almost as though being negative is part of their personality or defines them.**

Although some employees may frequently appear disgruntled, don’t be too quick to dismiss every one as having an unshakeable personality flaw. Some employees have valid concerns but have difficulty coming to supervisors and saying so. Although this is a separate problem, first initiate a discussion and sincerely ask about the nature of the employee’s concern. Don’t target the disgruntled behavior, at least not yet. Instead, see it as a symptom of a larger problem. Don’t be surprised to discover that simply talking with your employee may resolve the disgruntlement. Validating some employees in this way causes them to feel respected, and you and the employee can begin a new relationship based on understanding. A continuation of the behavior indicates a larger problem. Consultation with the EAP may be a potentially important way of resolving it.

■ **I have been a supervisor for 24 years. Recently HR told me I should attend a training presentation called, “Using the EAP in Supervision.” I don’t think there is much the EAP can teach me about supervision that I don’t already know. Should I still go?**

EAP supervisor training has a focus different from what you have in mind. Training helps supervisors understand the function of the EAP and their unique ability to help manage troubled employees. Training will explain how EAPs fit into the normal supervisory process to improve productivity and decrease the likelihood of disciplinary action of employees for performance problems. For many supervisors, this is a new aspect of performance management. Ironically, the more experience you have, the more important the training may be in order to understand how to apply the EAP to supervision. The EAP will illustrate different ways of dealing with troubled employees or those whose performance problems do not improve. This EAP approach includes professional assessment and referral of an employee to appropriate treatment. A well-constructed referral to the EAP with good follow-up often helps managers deal with these problems in a more proactive manner. This increases the likelihood of salvaging an employee, and greatly reduces risk to the agency.

■ **Some of my employees are better workers than others, so I naturally have a closer relationship with them on the job. My communication may be more friendly and jocular. Does this negatively affect other employees, and if so, isn’t that *their* problem?**

You can’t reasonably be expected to feel the same way about each of your employees. You will naturally have favorites, and you will at times communicate differently with them than you do with others. If you do demonstrate a warmer relationship with some employees, it will be noticed. You do have choices, however, regarding the degree to which you demonstrate these behaviors. You should consider their effects and how a visibly different communication style with certain employees may not best serve the interest of your work unit. Supervisors who have difficulty exercising control in this regard may be more focused on satisfying their own need for a personal relationship with subordinates than on what is best for the work unit. Discussing this matter with an EA Professional may provide new insight and help you maximize supervisory skills.

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